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AUTHOR Ball, Wesley A.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses aspects of the role of music in the preschool setting. The teaching and singing of folk songs are an avenue through which cultural literacy can be explored. A sensory approach to song learning that includes visual, kinesthetic, and aural stimuli increases children's vocabulary. Some theories suggest that musical intelligence is only one of several forms of intelligence. Without active musical involvement, there is a loss of children's musical aptitude between ages five and six. Because art forms are not isolated in the child's world, music can be used as a companion to other forms, such as dramatic play and stories. Strategies for teaching must be active. When such styles are used, children will be involved through sensory modes of learning. In conclusion, research shows that musical aptitude becomes stabilized before age nine, and that more consideration must be given to the musical experiences of children between the ages of three and eight. Appendixes contain songs and examples of active listening teaching strategies. (BC)

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Music: An Avenue for Cultural Literacy

SACUS Conference Presentation
March 15, 1991
Atlanta, Georgia

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PRESENTER: Wesley Ball, Ph.D.
Purdue University
Division of Music
CA-3
West Lafayette, IN
47907

phone: 317/494-0707

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Music: An Avenue for Cultural Literacy

SACUS Conference 1991
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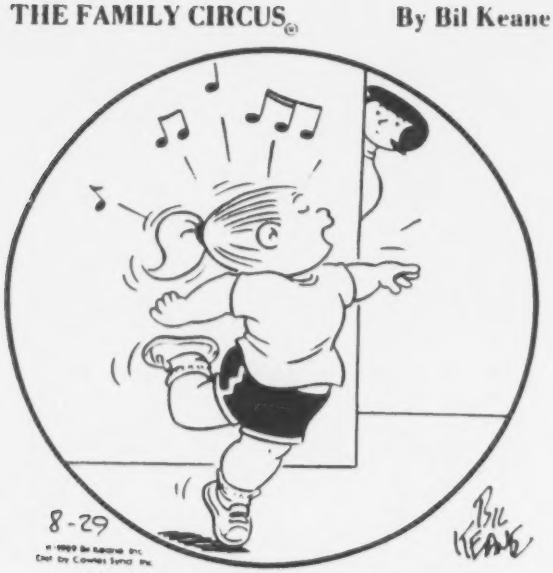
I. TEACHING AND SINGING SONGS

Although the term, *literacy*, often refers to language skills related to reading and writing, *cultural literacy* seeks to describe the content -- the substance of what we express. Cultural values and ethnic values are expressed through the arts, especially music. Folk songs are a wonderful avenue through which we can explore *cultural literacy*. Practical, as well as meaningful reasons support singing as an integral component in early childhood education:

1. Singing is an intimate experience--vocal sounds come from within the child.
2. Singing develops along with speech, functioning as a meaningful form of cultural expression.
3. Singing can be incorporated in group activities, as well as individual experiences for children. It is efficient, inexpensive, and available to all children.

In focusing on music in the preschool setting, the process of teaching songs has traditionally centered around rote methods that use echo-style activities where children listen, then imitate. Such methods are somewhat effective, but research suggests that a sensory approach, using visual and kinesthetic stimuli, along with the aural, yields greater understanding of song lyrics. Research data reveals that ten-month-old infants accumulate one-to-four-word vocabularies. Kucenski (1977) observed a ten-to-thirty-two word gain among a six month treatment group who had been exposed to song activities using sound, sight, and body movements.[1] Similar results have been observed with older children at the Purdue University Child Development Center. Here, three and four-year-old children were tested individually to measure song lyric retention and memory. Children, for example, were asked if they knew the song, "Jingle Bells." Individually, they were invited to sing the song. Videotaped performances were analyzed. In general, children offered their musical rendition with much enthusiam, especially on the word, "Hey!" Lyrics were clearly audible until the words, "one horse open sleigh." At this point, some children stopped singing (the song was "over"); others seemed to opt for humming at that point, mumbling something which seemed to "fit the occasion." {Listen to an audio example} Those children who did sing all the lyrics were asked to describe a "one horse open sleigh." Most shrugged their shoulders in dismay. The point here, illustrates a cultural anachronism that is foreign to the real-life experiences of youngsters today. Most children have never ridden or seen such a sleigh. Therefore, they merely mimic the words that they have heard when learning this song. A similar analogy is illustrated in a cartoon episode from the Family Circus. (see Figure 1.) Here, the child is bringing her own meaning to the song lyrics, trying to make sense of the abstract words. Too often, we sing about "Hot Cross Buns", or events where "Sally goes round the chimney pot", or we sing of places "way down yonder in the Paw Paw Patch." In actually, children are singing by rote, mimicing the words, with little understanding of the meaning embodied in these lyrics. Many cultural elements--past and present, can be experienced through folk songs of various ethnic origins. And what about the many bilingual children--the multi-cultural population that exists within our classrooms? America is no longer a "melting pot", but rather, a "tossed salad" of ethnic diversity. Cultural values are at risk

Figure 1*



"High-ho the stereo, the farmer in the well..."

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because they are not being taught with success in our schools. Hirsch (1987) notes that "before age three, when reading skills are more mechanical than interpretive, the United States stands in the top group of countires. Later, when reading requires an understanding of more complex content, our comparative ranking drops. Although our schools do comparatively well in teaching elementary decoding skills, they do less well than schools of some other countries in teaching the background knowledge that pupils must possess to succeed at mature reading tasks." [2]

More than ever, the Arts are needed in our schools. It is through Art that we express who we are. Music, in the words of Longfellow, is "the Universal Language." We must experience these "cultural nutrients", savoring the flavors of ethnic heritage and diversity, indigenous to American culture.

[Workshop Demonstration: Song examples using sensory modes of learning--see appendix A.]

1. My Puppy (Folk song from Mexico)
2. All Night, All Day (Afro-American Spiritual)
3. A Ram Sam Sam (Folk song from Morocco)
4. Ritsch Ratsch (Folk song from Sweden)
5. Little Bird, Go Through My Window (Folk song from South Carolina)

II. Music as an Intelligence

Intelligence has traditionally been measured via tests that focus on verbal and mathematical skills. In contrast, educational psychologist Howard Gardner suggests that we possess a variety of separate intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Gardner argues that all children deserve to have these various intelligences nourished to full potential. If overlooked, essential learning stages may be missed and potential intelligence will be diminished.[3]

Music educators have long realized two distinct dimensions of musical intelligence--aptitude and achievement. Longitudinal studies, begun in 1965 by Edwin Gordon, reveal that musical aptitude (the potential to learn music) becomes stabalized by age nine (Gordon 1987). From birth, musical aptitude is developmental in nature, a flexible capacity able to be influenced and shaped by environmental factors. Although musical achievement (musical knowledge/skill acquired through learning and practice) may vary greatly, depending on individual backgrounds and interests, the musical outcome is always influenced by basic aptitude. In school districts where there is no general music in the elementary curriculum, Gordon consistently finds that aptitude scores decline in children who are not actively involved with singing and moving to music. Findings show the greatest loss of aptitude between the ages of five and six.[4] Although there is currently no test to measure music aptitude in children younger than five years, there is a clear trend in Gordon's research. If children are offered a nurturing environment that includes "active" musical involvement, their music aptitude scores can increase until age nine, with the biggest increase occurring between the ages of five and six.[5]

NOTE: Many educators and psychologists eagerly await the results of Project Zero , a model school in Boston based on Gardner's theories. Here, students are involved in a curriculum that places equal emphasis on each of the seven intelligences. When viewed as a whole, these seven areas of "knowing" constitute cultural literacy. They work together to describe the various ways that we relate to the world around us. Music serves as a unique form of human expression. Music making, as an activity, involves human interaction and challenges us to use cognitive, kinesthetic, and affective modes of mentation.

III. Combining Music with Story Telling

The fluid manner in which the child operates precludes any clear division between musical and non musical experience. Educator Barbara Andress (1973) describes a young child's perceptions as synesthetic: "There are no clear dividing lines among various sense modalities. Cross-senses work in concert." (p.44) Gardner (1980) concurs: In the child's world, art forms are not isolated one from another. Children move readily, and even eagerly, from one form to another, combine them, and play one off against the other. " Music is a perfect companion to dramatic play, providing an opportunity for children to create "background music" for stories and poems.

"Sound-Story" Example #1:

Jack and Jill went up the hill,
(Play some ascending pitches on a xylophone)
To fetch a pale of water.
(Make sounds by pouring water into a metal pale)
Jack fell down,
(Strike a drum)
And broke his crown,
(Strike a wood block)
And Jill came tumbling after.
(Play descending sounds on a slide whistle)

Richard Lewis (1966) collected poems, written by children of various ages from English-speaking countries of the world. These poetic vignettes serve as rich sources of imagery. (It is also refreshing to see that children can also become "published"!)

"Sound-Story" Example #2 (from Miracles)

Musical introduction =
(Create an eerie mood by strumming the open strings of an autoharp)
Dark fills the sky with his big, black cloak,
(after word "cloak," strike a drum)
You never hear him come.
(period of silence)
One by one the stars peep through,
(randomly play pitches on a glockenspiel)
Out comes the moon,
(strike triangle)
Like a big yellow egg.
(strike a gong)

This poem lends itself to dramatization. For example, one child, wearing a black cloak, could be surrounded by children holding stars while another child lifts a big yellow moon from behind them. Children should be encouraged to create their own poems or stories incorporating sound and movement.

IV. Listening with a Purpose

Michael Hawn cites three objectives in adapting Jean Piaget's "theory of play" for early childhood music:

1. The musical concept should be specific, and related to a short life segment.
2. The music analogue must represent (or project) a life process with which the child is familiar.
3. The child must be allowed to actively project this life segment into musical terms, i.e., sensori-motor involvement.[9]

It is important to realize that young children are subject to artificial interpretation of their environment, where inanimate things are perceived as being animistic. The phenomenon of autumn leaves changing color, as a result of Jack Frost's paint brush, is congruent with a child's animistic thinking. Presenting music as a "life process" is congruent with a young child's imaginative thoughts and feelings. Children therefore need to experience the "living", moving qualities of music. Because the sounds of music are "invisible" to the eye, imagery becomes a valuable tool in teaching music. Here, imagery is realized through movement activities, as well as visual stimuli. In discussing the effects of imagery on learning with 9-year-olds, Paivio (1976) states that "imagery is centrally important in facilitating long term retention..."[10] Similarly, Broudy (1987) argues that imagery is requisite in all learning, regardless of age level.[11] In listening to music, the teaching strategies must be "active", where children are involved through sensory modes of learning.

[Demonstration: Active Listening Strategies--see appendix B.]
Musical Excerpts:

1. Antonio Vivaldi - "Winter" from The Seasons
2. Paul Winter - "Lullaby of the Great Whale to the Baby Seal Pups" from Callings
3. Modest Moussorgsky - "Promenade" from Pictures at an Exhibition
4. Claude Bolling - "Baroque and Blue" from Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano
5. Peter Tchaikovsky - "Chinese Dance" from The Nutcracker Suite

Conclusion

Research reveals that musical aptitude (the potential to learn music) becomes stabilized before age nine (Gordon, 1988; Feierabend, 1990). Gardner (1973) concludes that a child of seven or eight has already passed through all the developmental stages that qualitatively contribute to functioning artistically [and otherwise].[12] More consideration needs to be given to the quality of musical experiences for young children, ages three through eight, for these youngsters are developmentally receptive/responsive at a crucial juncture in life. In addition, music is a necessary "cultural nutrient" for healthy, human development. As an art-form, music serves as an avenue where we experience and express our inner being through artistic means. Music is a "universal language" with many different dialects -- a powerful vehicle for sharing feelings with one another.

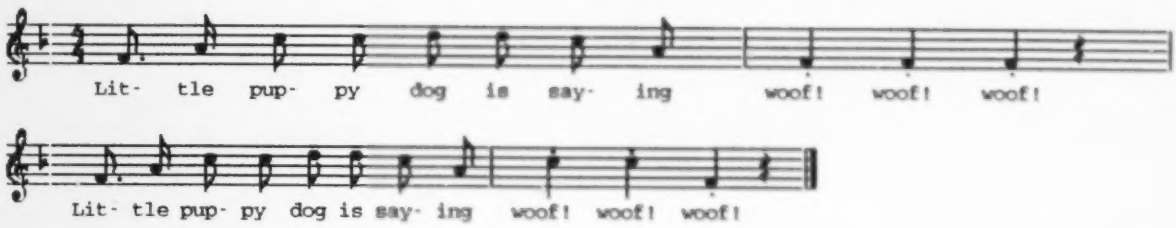
Appendix A

Song Examples Using Sensory Modes of Learning

My Puppy

Folk Song from Mexico

Song #1



Step 1: Using a dog hand-puppet, engage children in echo-style "barking." Explore high and low vocal sounds, allowing the puppet to visually depict the pitch range-- up and down.

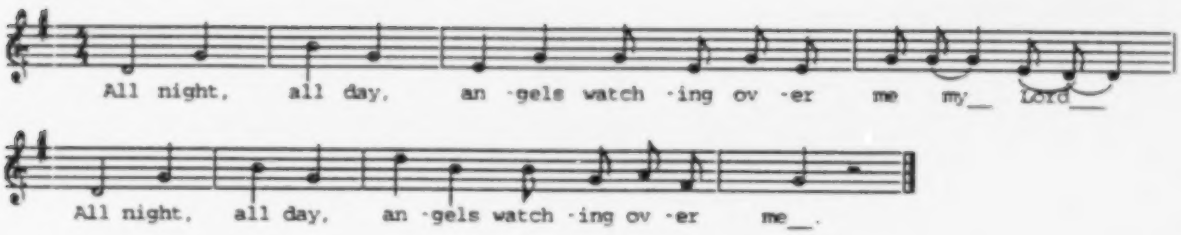
Step 2: Sing song for children, allowing the "puppet" to sing the lyrics, "woof, woof, woof." (The first three "barks" are down low; the second set of "barks" are: high, high, low.)

Step 3: Invite children to sing along, using their dog-puppets (simple, sock-puppets could be used -- an extension of an art activity.)

All Night, All Day

Afro-American Spiritual

Song #2



Step 1: Begin with a visual experience, calling attention to "night", "day", and "angels." Sing the song to children pointing to visuals.

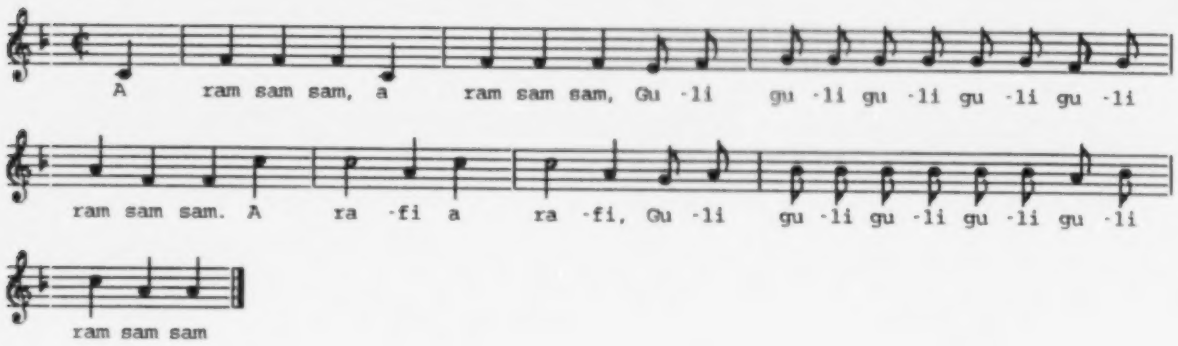
Step 2: Invite children to "act out" the song, adding motions. (See suggestions below)

VISUALS	LYRICS	MOVEMENTS
	"All night"	Pretend to be asleep; rest head on folded hands.
	"All day"	Wake up; curve arms over head. Be the sun.
	"Angels watching"	pretend to peep through "make believe" eye glasses.
	"Watching over me"	point to self.

A Ram Sam Sam

Folk Song from Morocco

Song #3



Step 1: Invite children to listen to a song that has "silly" words. (Sing song)

Step 2: Ask children to name some of the "silly" words.

Step 3: Teach the song in sections. Add movements with each "set" of nonsense words:

--"A ram sam sam, a ram sam sam" = clap hands to the steady beat (quarter note pulse).

--"Guli guli guli guli guli = alternate waving hands up and down, matching the faster, eighth note pulse.
ram sam sam" = return to clapping

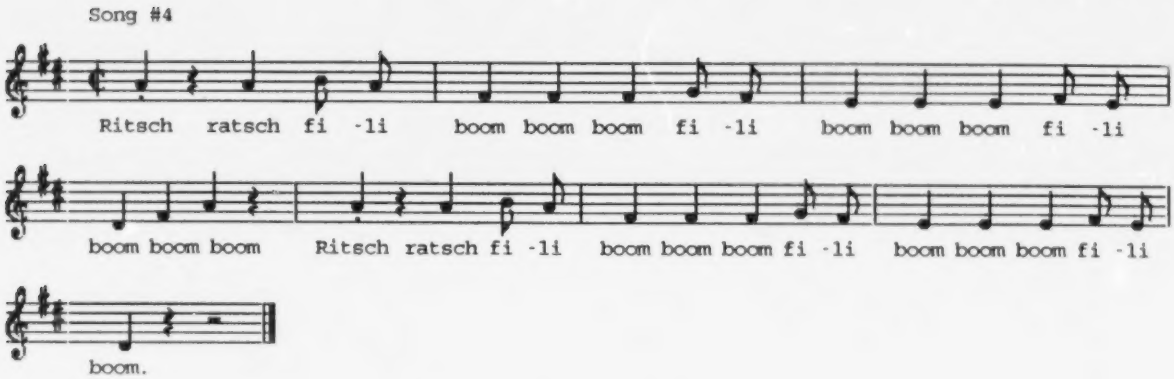
-- "A rafi, a rafi" = pat upper leg, using long durations of the half note pulse.

-- "Guli guli guli guli guli = return to waving hands

ram sam sam = return to clapping

NOTE: Children learn the words in association with the gestures. The motions can then help the children in singing the entire song, sequencing the order of the lyrics.

Ritsch Ratsch

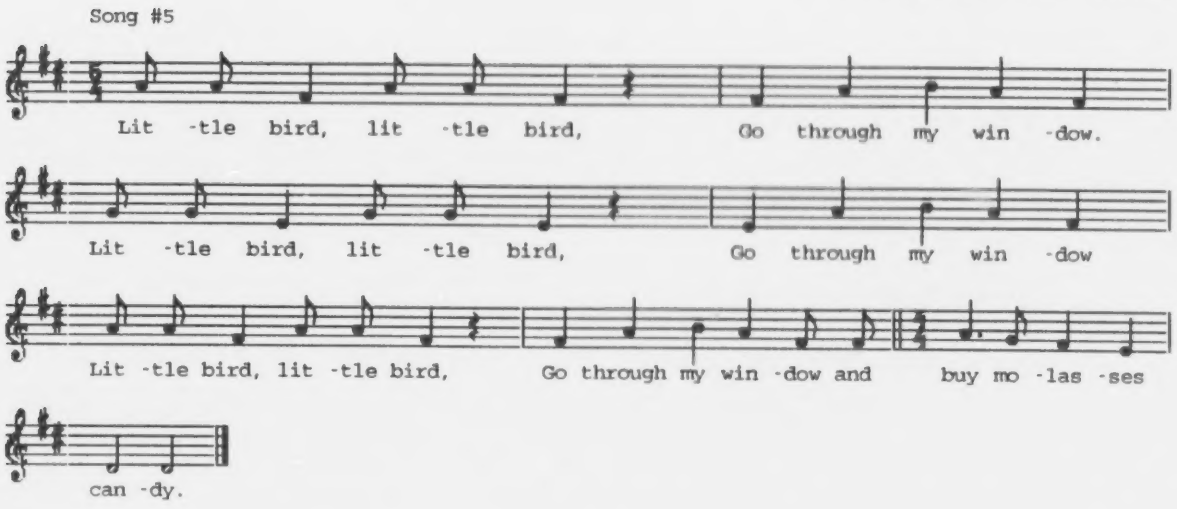
Folk Song from Sweden

Step 1: Sing song for children, clapping on the words, "boom boom boom."

Step 2: Enjoy (and reinforce) the "silly" nonsense words by adding motions -- rub hands together, up and down to coincide with "ritsch ratsch".

Step 3: Sing song, rubbing hands together on "ritsch ratsch" and clapping hands on the "boom booms."

Step 4: These motions serve as preparation for adding instruments. Try singing the song using sandblocks -- rubbing and clapping them together.

Little Bird, Go Through My Window

Folk Song from South Carolina

Song #5
Lit -tle bird, lit -tle bird, Go through my win -dow.
Lit -tle bird, lit -tle bird, Go through my win -dow
Lit -tle bird, lit -tle bird, Go through my win -dow and buy mo -las -ses
can -dy.

Step 1: Begin with a paraphrased story of a little bird who flew through the window. The little bird was hungry, but <u>not</u> for bird seed. Invite children to listen as you sing the "story." The bird bought some candy. What kind? (Sing song, emphasizing the lyrics, "molasses candy".

Note: It is interesting to incorporate a "tasting" experience, where children have the opportunity to dip a finger into some molasses, tasting its unique flavor.

Step 2: Teach song in sections. Add motions to the beginning. With one hand in the air, pretend to be a little bird flying around, up and down. With other arm, build a "make believe" window, arching at bodyside.

LYRICS	GESTURES
"Little bird, little bird"	gesture a flying bird with one hand
"Go through my window"	let the bird fly through the "make believe" window

Appendix B

Teaching Strategies: Active Listening

Listening Example #1:

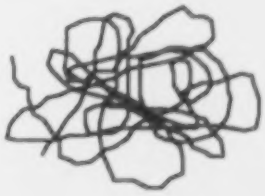
MUSIC CONCEPT: Rhythm (steady versus unsteady beat)

Musical Excerpt: "Winter" from The Four Seasons by Antonio Vivaldi

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES: To hear and respond to steady versus unsteady pulses.

BEAT	=	STEADY	versus	UNSTEADY
(HAND MOVEMENTS	=	REGULAR	versus	IRREGULAR)

(Clap steady beats)



(Move hands in irregular patterns)

THE LESSON:

Step 1: Practice clapping steady beats, switching to excited, "mixed up" hand motions. Alternate between steady claps and fast, irregular hand movements.

Step 2: Listen to the beginning of Vivaldi's "Winter." Find the steady beats by clapping--making "your hands behave" with the music. After several phrases, the music changes. A solo violin plays a florid, cadenza-like passage, departing from the previous regular pulses. Children are encouraged to move their hands in a rapid, unstructured manner. When the music returns to the steady pulses, children should "put the sounds into their hands."

Listening Example #2:

MUSIC CONCEPT: Tone Color (Sounds of the humpback whales combined with sounds of musical instruments.) Style = Contemporary

Pitch - high and low sounds form melodic contour.

MUSIC: "Sounds and Songs of the Humpback Whales" from Gentle Persuasion: The Sounds of Nature (SCD 4584.)

" Lullaby from the Great Mother Whale for the Baby Seal Pups" from Callings by Pall Winter (Living Music-LD0001)

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES: Students will view a video of whales, hearing the "songs" of humpback whales. In listening to Lullaby, students are invited to move to the music, imitating the up and down movements of the melody.

VIDEO SOURCES:

Gift of the Whales (Miramar, 200 2nd Ave. W., Seattle, WA 98119)
Filmed in a small coastal Indian village, a Native American boy learns about the mysteries of the great whales.
The Great Whales (National Geographic) excerpt of whale songs.
Signs of the Apes: Songs of the Whales (NOVA) excerpt from end, briefly features composer, Paul Winter.

THE LESSON

Step 1: View excerpts of videos and listen to sounds (songs) of whales.

Step 2: Listen to the excerpt from "Lullaby" by Winter. Listen for the natural sounds of whales, compared with the sounds of "traditional" musical instruments.

Step 3: As music plays, use hand movement--up and down, to coicide with the melodic contour.

STRUCTURE OF THE MUSICAL EXCERPT:

Introduction = natural whale sounds, mixed with guitar

Soprano Sax melody = high/low melodic alternation
Using a whale hand-puppet, model the up and down contour of the melody. After several phrases, invite children to move their hands to the music, imitating the graceful, bouyant movements of whales, seen in the video. Focus on the shape of the melody--up and down. When the music gets slower, suggest that the whales are getting tired. Let them "go to sleep" as the music ends.

Ending = Whale sounds fade.

Listening Example #3:

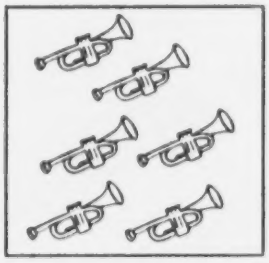
Music Concept: Texture / Tone Color (Timbre)

Music can sound thin or thick depending on the number of sounds--layers of sound. Here, the music explores the timbre and texture of brass instruments.

VISUALS:

one trumpet

many brass instruments



Music: "Promenade" from Pictures at an Exhibition by Modest Mussorgsky (orchestrated by Ravel)

Behavioral Objective: Children will hold up fingers, demonstrating the difference between the sound of ONE and MANY brass instruments.

THE LESSON

Step 1: Listen to the beginning of the "Promenade." The music alternates between the sound of one trumpet and that of many brass instruments--a dialogue of textures, one and many. As the music begins, hold up the picture of a trumpet. When the texture changes, call attention to the visual of brass instruments. Alternate visuals as the music shifts back and forth.

Step 2: Repeat the excerpt, allowing children to hold up one finger for the trumpet, in contrast to all ten fingers when the texture changes. (Move with the steady beats of the music) With fingers, children demonstrate the difference between the sound of thin and thick textures in music.

Listening Example #4:

MUSIC CONCEPT: Style (Old versus New; Past versus Present)

MUSIC: "Baroque and Blue" from Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano by Claude Bolling--
a contemporary composer who fuses jazz with classical forms.

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES: Children will demonstrate through constrasting conducting styles, the contrast of two periods of artistic expression--a "classical" style versus a "jazz" style.

MATERIALS: Compare photographs taken of people from the 1800's and present day. (Or compare the architectual styles of two houses--one contemporary, the other Victorian.)

THE LESSON:

Step 1: Establish the idea of past and present through visuals that represent old and new stylistic trends (see visual examples). Discuss the differences, as well as similarities.

Step 2: View a video excerpt of an orchestra concert, noticing the conductor directing the musicians with hand movements. (Practice a "traditional" conducting pattern appropriate for duple meter--down, up.)

Step 3: Next, view an excerpt of a jazz combo. Here, the band leader conducts in a less "formal" way, sometimes dancing or swaying to the music--maybe even "snapping" the fingers. (Practice a simple duple pattern, feeling a "jazzy" swing with your body.)

Step 4: Pick a steady beat and alternate between styles--several measures using a traditional "down-up" pattern, and several measures using a "finger snap" jazz style.

Step 4: Listen to "Baroque and Blue." Conduct the beats to "fit the music." Alternate conducting styles as the music changes.

Listening Example #5:

MUSIC: "I'm My Own Walkman" from The Voice by Bobby McFerrin
(Electra Records 60366-1-E)
"Chinese Dance" from The Nutcracker Suite by Peter Tchaikovsky

Behavioral Objective: Children will move hand-held artificial flowers to music, responding directionally to high and low registers.

Materials: " Rock 'n Flowers" by TAKARA (Distributed by WACO)--a battery operated sound sensitive "dancing flower".

Artificial flowers (one for each child).

THE LESSON:

Step 1: Place the "dancing flower" near a speaker of the sound system. Listen to an excerpt of McFerrin, watching the flower respond to the rhythmic impulses of the music.

Step 2: Have children use their voices, exploring high and low sounds in a rap-style. (Lead students in some echo speech patterns) Use the artificial flowers as "hand puppets'. When speaking in high voices, let the flowers dance high in the air. When speaking rap-style, in a low voice, the flowers will move down low.

Step 3: Listen to the "Chinese Dance." The music begins low. Invite children to let their flowers dance with the music, moving rhythmically with the beat. When the music changes to high sounds, let the flowers dance high in the air; when the music moves lower, let the flowers respond by moving downward.

NOTES

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